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ABSTRACT

This document describes the vision and priorities of Howard Community College's (HCC's) Economic and Workforce Development Task Force. The task force's commission was to identify the long- and short-term skills businesses will demand of the workforce in the Greater Baltimore area and what Howard Community College must do to continue developing these skills in the workforce. The first section of the report presents the vision of the task force, which was established by analyzing the labor market trends in the region. It found that the region has a very broad base of businesses with very few clusters, and that the vast majority of businesses are small with a few employees. It also projected various jobs and skills that would be in greater demand in the near future. Based upon this information, the task force aims to focus on the changes in the workplace, recognizing the environment as rapidly changing and therefore requiring the constant acquisition of new knowledge. Specific recommendations are provided for HCC, including: (1) developing processes to stay informed about employer needs in terms of training; (2) creating environments that can respond rapidly to business needs; (3) encouraging credit faculty to stay in touch with industry needs; and (4) reorganizing the research and planning area to provide data that will trigger new program and service developments. (JJL)

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ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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Howard Community College
Commission on the Future

Economic & Workforce Development Task Force

I. Explanation of the Issue

The task force was charged with identifying what skills businesses will demand of the workforce in the region in the short and long term and what Howard Community College must do to contribute to developing these skills in the workforce.

II. Task Force Vision

It is obvious that as the 21st century approaches, a highly skilled workforce is fundamental for survival. Indeed, there is recognition that employees in this knowledge age are perhaps the most precious forms of capital. In trying to build a skilled, productive, dedicated and cohesive workforce, many companies throughout America are responding with providing their present employees with state-of-the-art training that prepares them for global pressures, changing technologies, and increased diversification in the workplace.

The task force first established a foundation for discussion of the future workforce by analyzing the labor market trends in the Greater Baltimore area. Recent surveys by the Greater Baltimore Committee/DBED/High Technology Council and the Howard County Workforce Preparedness Committee as well as the economic environment analyses of Dr. Anirban Basu of the RESI and experience of the commission members provided the following data:

- The region has a very broad base of business with very few clusters.
- There are about 7000 businesses in Howard County and 70% are considered small businesses with less than 10 employees. Key points include that smaller companies look at issues very differently than large companies especially related to
    1) projected employment needs
    2) how they view the current economic climate
    3) how they identify their job needs

- The greatest numbers of jobs in the county are now in the services area, retail trade, government, and wholesale trade. (Services area includes software/hardware services, as well as hotel, restaurant, etc)

- The natural targets for economic development include:

  - distribution
  - healthcare support
  - non-profit organizations

- 33% of the population in Howard County travels to Washington Metro area to work each day and 31% travels to the Baltimore Metro area. This represents 86,000 people who are mostly employed in professional occupations.

- Only 60,000 people commute in to the county to add to the 50,000 people who live and are employed in the county. Many of those who commute in cannot afford to live in the county.

- The highest demand for workers over the next several years will be information technology workers, lab technicians, and production and process technicians for manufacturing. (GBC Survey)

- IT workers are harder to recruit here than in NY/NJ; Raleigh/Durham; and Atlanta. Potential employees are concerned about jobs for their spouses and the ability to find another job should their company or industry experience layoffs.

- Technology firms reported substantially high expenditures on worker training than the broad cross section of Maryland businesses surveyed by the Maryland business Partnership in 1997.

- The manufacturers of the region need computer literate production people that possess excellent analytical and verbal skills. Skilled machinists and crafts personnel continue to be extremely difficult to find.

- Howard County employers project hiring 44,000 workers over the next three years, including growth and replacement
  - One job in five will be in sales, one in five will be unskilled laborers

- While sales represents just 8% of the workforce today, 21% of the projected need in the next 3 years is for sales workers

- The number of sales workers will more than double in the next three years

- Employers anticipate difficulty in filling open positions. On a five point scale:
  - The average expected difficulty is 3.5
  - Scientists/Engineers and Software Professionals are expected to be most difficult (4.2)
  - Unskilled laborers and Administrative/Clerical are expected to be the least difficult to hire (2.9)

- In general, smaller employers anticipate more difficulty in hiring

- 13,000 of the 44,000 projected Howard County jobs (32%) over the next three years will require a college degree or higher

- 74% of Software Professional jobs will require a college degree or higher

- 2,600 jobs will require post-high school technical training, most of them in service or labor
- Employees are most frequently seen as deficient in work ethics, verbal communication, and basic writing skills.

- Skills most often cited as most important to respondents' businesses are:
  - Work Ethics 97%
  - Social Skills 65%
  - Verbal Communication 59%
  - Reading Skills 53%

- The three most important business environment issues seen by respondents are:
  - Skilled labor shortage 44%
  - Quality of Education 41%
  - Workforce Preparedness 40%

III. Recommendations

The common theme emulating from the discussions of this task force is the need to focus on the changes in the workplace as an organization. As work becomes less task oriented and more people oriented, workers are required to be broadly skilled, able to think critically, make decisions, solve problems and effectively communicate with co-workers and customers. Beyond these core abilities and the required knowledge in the "three R's", the competencies that the modern workplace stresses also include these identified by a recent Stanford University study:

- Planning – establishing goals and scheduling and prioritizing activities
- Obtaining and using information – deciding what is relevant and then putting it to use
- Reasoning by evaluating and generating logical arguments
- Peer Training – informal and formal coaching and advisement
- Initiative – Demonstrated by thinking and performing independently
- Cooperation – Constructive, goal-directed interaction with others

It is well recognized that in this environment of rapid change, we are all faced with the constant acquisition of new knowledge. Because learning happens not only in the formal classroom sessions, but in the informal situations as well; in the halls, in study or work groups or wherever the opportunity arises, Howard Community College must position itself as an institution that stimulates continuous learning.

Toward this end, specific recommendations include that HCC should:

- Develop processes to stay informed about employer needs in terms of training.
- Create environments that can respond rapidly to businesses needs.
- Encourage (hire) credit faculty who also provide service to the Continuing Education and Workforce Development division so that faculty stay in touch with industry needs and assist in meeting demands of new markets.
- Reorganize the Research and Planning area to provide the data that will trigger new program/service development.

- Seek partnerships to share regional databases.
- Sponsor an improved marketing effort and be part of the advance team that "welcomes" new business and potential business to the county
- Engage faculty and students in projects (e.g. In Economics) that provide, collect and analyze business trends.
- Incorporate work ethics, team skills, problem solving, and technology foundation into all curriculum.
- Streamline communications and processes so that "leads" are acted upon in a timely fashion.
- Expand existing training markets - e.g.K-12 teacher training and on-line training product development

IV. Other Issues to be Addressed

1. Howard Community College needs to catch the wave of E-commerce.
   - Books should be ordered
   - Registration should be available
   - Program previews available such as media clips of an instructor of a potential course
2. Establish a mechanism within the HCC Website to track which portions of the site are visited and for how long
   - Poll prospective students to see what influenced their decision to register
3. What process will HCC use to define "skill sets" of future jobs?